

Syndicalism and Industrial Unionism

By Louis Fraina

THE healthy discussion of Unionism now on in the Socialist Movement has a decidedly regrettable feature—the virtually general rejection of Industrial Unionism, and the adoption of Syndicalism as a synonym for Revolutionary Unionism. It is regrettable because:

1. Theoretically, Syndicalist philosophy is opposed to the Socialist philosophy. Industrial Unionism is the application of Socialist principles to economic organization, whereas Syndicalism is Anarchy unionized.

2. Tactically, the structure and goal of Industrial Unionism and Syndicalism differ materially, a difference which I consider should be emphasized rather than minimized.

Wm. English Walling having, in the March INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW, pointed out some of these differences, Robert Rives LaMonte, in the May NEW REVIEW, rejoins that Walling "bears down so hard on the differences that his article practically obscures or eclipses the essential identity of the two movements."

On the contrary, far from needlessly emphasizing these differences, Walling does not emphasize them sufficiently.

LaMonte pleads for unity: "Let us cease hunting for points of difference! Let us search unceasingly for points of union." But that is rather a dangerous basis for unity. It was the spirit in which the British Labor Party was formed, and that party is hardly a credit to the Movement. And it was in that spirit that the International Congress recognized organizations repudiating the class struggle, and even betraying the proletariat, as the Australian Labor Party has done repeatedly.

"Anarchists and Socialists are reconciled in Syndicalism," says La Monte. A surprising statement. In France Socialists and Anarchists have been in each other's hair over the control of Syndicalism.

Socialists and Anarchists have convulsed the American Industrial Union movement over the question of political action, the Anarchists ridiculing and opposing class political action. Is "unity" to exist by Socialists "lying low" and allowing political action, an indispensable weapon of the Revolution, to be hostilized? Unity among revolutionary unionists should imply mutual concessions—Socialists modify their extremist pro-political attitude, Anarchists drop their hostility to political action.

This important question must be met now. Many Comrades, having seen a "great light," are prone to minimize the anti-political trend among revolutionary unionists. Enthusiasm for Revolutionary Unionism should not stimulate extremes. It is the part of wisdom to anticipate. Unless we here and now make efforts to stem the anti-political tide we may have a deluge in the future.

Syndicalism is anti-political. Many deny this, holding that Syndicalism simply means revolutionary economic action. The "syndicalism" of the C. G. T., however, arose as a revulsion against political action and is distinctly anti-political; while in England and America Syndicalism has been adopted as a *particular* form of unionism—anti-political. "Syndicalism" is the French name for Unionism—nothing more. In France there exists Revolutionary Syndicalism (unionism) and Conservative Syndicalism (unionism). The term has been adopted in England and America in the revolutionary sense of the C. G. T.—a particular form of revolutionary unionism, aiming at the Revolution through violence, the General Strike and Revolt.

Many persons in adopting Syndicalism have modified it to suit their convenience, with the consequence that pro-political Industrialism is being preached in the name of Syndicalism. This confusion is to be deplored. Consequently, the Syndi-

calist League of North America, recently organized, serves a useful purpose. The League sticks to undiluted Syndicalism, and its pamphlet on "Syndicalism" makes clear the anti-political feature. "Syndicalism's rejection of political action and opposition to the Socialist Movement are due to: (1) the superiority of direct action to political action; (2) that the Syndicalist and Socialist movements are rivals and cannot co-operate."

LaMonte says that "the Anarchists did not invent Syndicalism." Yet revolutionary Syndicalism in France arose with the entrance of the Anarchists into the syndicates who "bored from within," emphasizing not revolutionary principles, but militant possibilist action. Sorel, in his "Reflections on Violence," says:

"Historians will some day see, in this entrance of the Anarchists into the syndicates, one of the greatest events that have happened in our time.

"Anarchistic writers who remained faithful to their old revolutionary literature do not seem to have regarded with favor the passage of their friends into the syndicates; their attitude shows us that the Anarchists who became Syndicalists were men of true originality and did not apply theories which had been manufactured by cloistered philosophers. Above everything else, they taught the workers that it was not necessary to blush over violent actions. Until then, they had tried, in the Socialist world, to minimize or to excuse the violence of strikers; the new Syndicalists looked upon these acts of violence as the normal manifestations of the class war."

Industrial Unionism, on the other hand, was inspired by Socialism. An editorial in "The American Labor Union Journal" (December, 1904), organ of the industrial American Labor Union, expressed itself as follows:

"The economic organization of the proletariat is the heart and soul of the Socialist Movement, of which the political party is simply the public expression at the ballot box. The purpose of Industrial Unionism is to organize the working class on approximately the same departments of production and distribution as those which will obtain in the Co-operative Commonwealth."

The Industrial Workers of the World, as organized in Chicago in 1905, planted itself upon political action as an indispensable weapon; although it must be admitted that the Manifesto calling the Chicago Conference rather unduly accentuated politics.

Syndicalism is Anarchic in structure as well as tactics. French Syndicalism opposes centralization, carrying the principles of federated autonomy to its logical limit. It does away with a "central authority" in the orchestra of production. It stands for many unions instead of One Big Union. Syndicalists and Industrial Unionists agree in aiming at the overthrow of the state; but while Industrial Unionism seeks to supplant political government with *industrial government*—Engles' "administration of things"—Syndicalism has *no use* for government of any sort. In structure, Syndicalism is really sectional unionism; in theory, Syndicalism holds to the old Proudhonian idea of independent, communal groups, producing and exchanging commodities on an independent basis—a sort of communal competition.

It is true, as LaMonte holds, that the craft autonomy of Syndicalism reflects French undeveloped Capitalism. But he ignores the fact that Syndicalism holds to craft autonomy as a *theory* on which it basis its conception of present organization and future society; and that Syndicalists in England and America emphasize industrial autonomy in their fight against Industrial Unionism. The pamphlet of the S. L. N. A., previously mentioned, says:

"In the future society the shop organization will be perfectly autonomous—each automatically regulating its own affairs and requiring no interference from without. The producing force of society will be composed of autonomous units—each industry constituting a unit."

Again:

"In the future society all industries will be monopolized and each will regulate its production according to the demands placed upon it by the rest of society. The relations between the various industries will be simply the filling of each other's orders for commodities."

And again:

"Society as a whole is not consulted. The steel industry dictates to the rest of society in matters pertaining to the steel industry."

These American Syndicalists cite the "recent breaking up of the Harriman railroad system into five autonomous sub-systems" as proof of their claim that industry is trending toward autonomy. Were this true, the Syndicalist claim would be logical. But its truth is only apparent.

At the time the unions on the Harriman system federated, industrial unionists argued that as the roads *were united into an organic system*, the workers should follow suit. Only those deceived by appearances will claim that the Harriman roads have de-centralized; what slight decentralization there has been resulted from the internecine strife among interests concerned. The Harriman system is still under a central control.

Is the alleged de-centralization of Standard Oil into "independent, mutually competing" groups proof of the autonomy trend? The financial district of New York knows better. Standard Oil is as much centralized as ever, though under a different form. For some time, the Southern Pacific has been trying to "de-centralize," but all its plans have been rejected by the Government. Why? Because the re-organization schemes submitted virtually maintain centralization, under a form, however, which would throttle anti-trust laws.

There IS a form of centralization that intelligent capitalists are discarding and financial papers warning against. That is centralization which strains for "monopoly" at any price. President Mellen, of the New Haven system, purchased a road that was absolutely non-paying and of no use to his system, *simply to monopolize* New England's railroads. An absolutely vicious procedure, the practice of which largely brought on Mellen's financial troubles. The *Journal of Commerce* (N. Y.) condemned this sort of action as inefficient and a relic of the past.

We must, however, necessarily differentiate between centralization and "monopoly"—I use "monopoly" in its true, *limited* sense, absolute monopoly being only theoretically possible, as Marx showed and modern conditions prove.

Centralization is an economic necessity; "monopoly" generally a *forced* condition. Centralization is industrial; "monopoly" financial, and this may be destroyed without disturbing industrial centralization. The rejection of Mellen "centralization" does not imply de-centralization and autonomy.

Under Capitalism, centralization undoubtedly has limits because of the evils it generates. Men of the Brandeis type have distorted this truth, and condemned ALL centralization as inefficient; and it is peculiar that Anarchists and Syndicalists should echo this talk. The evils in centralization flow from *autocratic* or *oligarchic* control, but are not inherent.

Secretary of Commerce Wm. C. Redfield, addressing the American Cotton Manufacturers' Association convention in Washington, on April 9, said:

"A good many years ago the late Edward M. Shepard said to me that he believed the trust form of organization carried within itself the seeds of its own decay; that its economies were more apparent than real, and that the serious difficulty of obtaining the men who could manage efficiently, with firm grasp, these great organizations, would itself result in ultimate segregation."

In vast organizations like the trusts, with ONE MAN rule, efficiency depends largely upon the capacity of one man. "Is there a point," asked Redfield, "where the mere nerves and fibers of the industrial organization required to handle the larger force become so complex and delicate that the frictional transmission, so to speak, of the will and thought of the head becomes so great that it is weakened or lost?" Assuredly, where despotism prevails; and because of the despotism, not the centralization. Representative government in those vast centralized trusts, and in the vaster industrial system centralized as a WHOLE, would eliminate the evil.

Trusts are a sort of industrial empire. An empire, ruled autocratically from above, disintegrates when its limits expand beyond the possible efficient control of ONE man. History shows the Roman Empire, ruled autocratically, first de-centralizing into two "sub-systems"—the Eastern and Western Empire; and then collapsing under its own weight. The

vast empire reared by Charlemagne crumbled in the hands of his successors who lacked his genius and powerful personality.

But here we have the United States, with a territory larger than the Empire of Rome or of Charlemagne, in no danger of crumbling under its own weight, because of its representative government, its division of authority into State units and the centralization of these State units into a Federal government.

In a sense, Industrial Unionism applies on the economic field this American form of government—the local union comparable to the municipality, the industrial union to the State, and the amalgamated industrial organization with its administrative, representative government, to the nation. But this, of course, implies Democracy; and the Syndicalist is rabidly anti-Democratic, one of the counts in its indictment against Socialism being our theory of Industrial *Democracy*.

The trend of economic evolution is toward centralization. Civilization presuppose maximum production with minimum labor; this requires large-scale production; which, in turn, demands highly centralized production, consequently also Industrial Government.

Were this purely a matter concerning the future social structure, it might possess only a theoretical interest. But its importance lies in this, that autonomous revolutionary unions can with difficulty act spontaneously and effectively, all the

more so when, as will undoubtedly be the case in America, strikes assume gigantic proportions. Considered tactically, the structure of Industrial Unionism is a necessity for the preliminary struggles of the Revolution—what our French comrades call “revolutionary gymnastics.” Spirit, aspirations, must have effective *forms* of expression.

Syndicalism emphasizes tactics; Industrial Unionism emphasizes *structure* and *goal*, tactics flowing naturally therefrom. The tactical emphasis of Syndicalism generates slavery to means; Syndicalism, accordingly, considers violence a *creative principle*. But violence is in no sense creative; it is a *method*, a *matter of expediency*. Industrial Unionism, considering methods purely a matter of expediency, apotheosizes neither violence nor legality;—not violence or legality, but either or both as conditions may demand.

Summarizing conclusions:

Syndicalism arose primarily as a protest against political inefficiency and cowardice.

Industrial Unionism arose primarily as a recognition of the vast power inherent in the industrial groups into which the mechanism of centralized capitalist production marshals the workers.

Industrial Unionism, accordingly, is the expression of the highest development of Capitalism. Why, then, should Industrial Unionism adopt the nomenclature, structure and tactics of Syndicalism, a product of inferior Capitalism?

